Greetings Friends,

We are excited to celebrate another year and all of the great things the Montana Natural History Center accomplished in 2021 with you!

We re-opened our exhibit hall to the public just in time for spring break, and MNHC excitedly transitioned our programming from the online, virtual formats necessary in 2020 back to more traditional, in-person learning experiences!

And what a fantastic time staff, volunteers, and our board of directors had, once again being together, in person, with inquisitive minds, youth and adult alike.

As spring gave way to summer we welcomed many Discovery Day Camp participants—387 in all! The smiles on the faces of campers, staff, and parents were big and so rewarding to witness!

The smiles continued on our staff's and board's faces as we entered the school year and got back to our routine of guiding western Montana fourth and fifth graders on field trips in nature and joining them in their classrooms for nature and science exploration and understanding.

As MNHC closed out our 30th year, we did so by rejoicing in another great year of learning about the natural world and savoring the return of face-to-face, in person programming. What's more, we are excited and looking forward to a very bright future—another 30 years of curiosity, learning, and excellence.

Thurston Elfstrom
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Katie Guffin
PRESIDENT, MNHC
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

This year's annual report features artwork from artist and MNHC teaching naturalist Jenah Mead. This art was created for MNHC's newest exhibit, Montana's Ancient Past. Stop by our Center to see it in person!
IMPACT

While not without its difficulties, 2021 began to feel a little more normal. We welcomed 2,232 people into our exhibit space this year. We ran summer camps and field trips, trained Master Naturalists, and even opened our newest exhibit: Montana’s Ancient Past. There was so much interest in the exhibit’s grand opening that we had to add a second viewing for the evening! 80 guests joined us in celebrating the finalization of this beautiful new space.

While we have loved getting together in person once again and exploring our love of nature, one positive from the pandemic was realizing how much we could increase our program reach through online options. In 2021 we continued to offer and grow our virtual programming, with our online programs reaching people in AL, CA, CO, FL, GA, IA, IL, MA, MD, MI, MN, MS, MT, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, SC, SD, UT, VA, WA, WI, British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Panama!

As always, it is our passion for our shared mission to promote and cultivate the appreciation, understanding, and stewardship of nature through education that keeps us working diligently and continually evolving as an organization.

CUE THE 2021 HIGHLIGHTS:

MNHC engaged over 13,000 people in 2021.

$12,825 awarded in scholarships. MNHC is dedicated to expanding accessibility to our programs to connect adults and children to nature, regardless of their financial situations.

13,583 YouTube views with a total of 2,061 hours of watch time.

68,696 page views of our website’s educational content.
OUR 2021 PROGRAMS

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

8,091 students were impacted by our educational programming in person, online, in homeschool, and beyond!

Visiting Naturalist in the Schools (VNS)
While we began our year delivering online content, in September 2021 our teaching naturalists returned to the classrooms, forests, and hands-on nature education we all missed so much!

VNS connects professional naturalists with fourth- and fifth-grade students in classrooms across western Montana. Each student receives a journal to record observations, practice nature journaling, and develop their reading and writing skills. Our naturalists teach and mentor students by encouraging ongoing inquiry and curiosity about the natural world. Our curriculum is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards that also contribute to curriculum goals in literacy, critical thinking, and communication.

“...And, again, congratulations to you and the VNS team. You created and delivered great programming throughout the pandemic and maybe brought a little bit of normalcy to the school year. Even though you were not there in person, each of you were able to mentor and excite the students about the natural world by demonstrating great naturalist behaviors and skills in the videos. I hope you and all MNHC staff are as proud of you as I am!”

—Kelly Dix, Master Naturalist, Science Educator, and VNS Volunteer, Spring 2021

MISSOULA SCHOOLS
Chief Charlo
DeSmet
Franklin
Hawthorne
Jeanette
Rankin
Lewis and Clark
Lowell
Missoula
Christian
Montessori
Paxson
Rattlesnake
Russell
St. Joseph
Target Range

OTHERS:
Hellgate
(virtual class)

VISITING NATURALIST IN THE SCHOOLS
$3,245 in scholarships awarded to VNS schools
1,091 students in the VNS program
24 schools served with
59 classrooms participating

16 volunteers gave 213 hours through our VNS program alone!
Our staff provided 468 hours of direct instruction.
The Interactive Distance Learning Program delivers live, interactive programming through video conferencing across the state of Montana and beyond.

The ID Naturalist LIVE! program brings professional naturalists into third- through fifth-grade classrooms through the use of video conferencing to teach science and natural history across rural Montana. Students get to experience naturalist-led classroom lessons—most of which include outdoor exploration—via monthly virtual nature and science experiences.

ID Naturalist is a subscription-based service. Educators gain access to ten web-based video lessons presented by a teaching naturalist that can be opened at the convenience of the teacher and in the comfort of the classroom.

ID NATURALIST LIVE
9 schools
10 classrooms
250 students

ID NATURALIST
16 classrooms
and homeschools
210 students

Streamable Learning
The Montana Natural History Center has been a content provider for Streamable Learning since 2019. This innovative programming connects districts and classrooms across North America for live and interactive educational events.

WOW
The Wings Over Water (WOW) Osprey Program brings STEM research into middle and high school classrooms across the U.S. and sparks student interest in biology, physics, chemistry, math, and engineering through the study of Ospreys. The program starts by building STEM capacity for teachers through a week-long workshop in Missoula. Teachers return to the classroom with a rich curriculum which is built around Next Generation Science Standards and can be tailored to each classroom’s needs.

We were able to run a virtual summer teacher training once again in 2021!

Homeschool Naturalists runs September-April and gives students the opportunity to learn about the natural history of Montana while gaining naturalist skills and making friends. Each month the group explores our place in the ecosystems. We love using the naturalist tools of science, writing, and art.

HOMESCHOOL NATURALISTS
10 preschool-kindergarten students
40 elementary students
10 middle school students
36 families served

STREAMABLE LEARNING
10 classes taught
3,500 participants from
16 states and
3 Canadian provinces
REACH: AL, CA, CO, FL, GA, IA, IL, MD, MT, NC, NY, PA, SC, SD, VA, WI, British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan

WOW
12 teachers participated in the summer course.
The curriculum impacts more than 2,000 students across the country.
YOUTH PROGRAMS

Saturday Kids’ Activities returned in full force in July. From the second weekend in July to the first week in September we ran Saturday Kids’ activities every Saturday. After September, we began to offer this program twice a month. We learned all about animal tracks and how to identify them, examined various kinds of skulls, competed in Animal Olympics and learned about the specialized things that animal bodies can do, and so much more! Every month features a new topic. The exploration and activities are suitable for a wide age range, so the whole family can be involved!

The miniNaturalists Pre-K program engages young children in the exploration of the natural world through fun hands-on activities and games. The program emphasizes observation, sensory skills, and imagination to cultivate a positive connection with nature at an age when children are just beginning to investigate the world around them.

Summer Camps returned and took over! Our full-day, week-long, nature-themed camps ran all summer long for preschool (age 4 and up) through 5th grade. We were thrilled to open our doors once again and fill our exhibit hall with the merriment of children learning. Due to smoky air conditions throughout the summer we moved many of the programs inside and closed the exhibit hall to the public yet again. Our staff pivoted quickly and we managed to have a successful and fun summer exploring nature—even if indoors occasionally.

SATURDAY KIDS’ ACTIVITIES

53 kids and 21 adults participated in the 14 programs we held after we began again in July.

MININATURALISTS PRE-K PROGRAM

80 children and their parents participated in the 15 fun and imaginative programs we began again in September 2021.

SUMMER CAMPS

$12,825 was awarded in summer camp scholarships to children in need.

387 kids participated in 31 camps

6:1 student-to-instructor ratio
The STEEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Environment, and Mathematics) Program welcomed a new group of incoming middle school girls into our professional mentorship opportunity. STEEM aims to inspire the next generation of female scientists through hands-on learning and real-world experiences. Through this program girls build trust, confidence, and courage in the fields of science, technology, engineering, environment, and math. These fields have a disproportionately lower percentage of PhDs earned by females; this program aims to close that gap in our community.

“STEEM has been such an amazing aspect of my life in the last few years and has helped me become the person I am today. The friends I have made and the skills that I have learned will be with me in the future, as well as all the amazing memories I have made with this group. I hope that the STEEM program will be around for other groups of girls my age to enjoy and learn from.”

— 2020-2021 STEEM Sister
NEW EXHIBIT AND CENTER UPDATES!

**Montana’s Ancient Past:**
MNHC’s newest exhibit celebrates Montana’s fascinating geological past through fossils! This exhibit also features the incredible artwork—large and small—of artist and MNHC teaching naturalist Jenah Mead. By highlighting the previous five large extinction events, this exhibit is as timely as it is beautiful. The exhibit ends with a discussion on climate change, climate actions we can all take, and poses the question, "When will the sixth major extinction happen?"

This exhibit was made possible thanks to a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a partnership with the University of Montana Paleontology Center, and the tireless efforts of our staff and volunteers. Make sure to stop by the Center to check it out!

**Salish Immersion Project:**
At the end of 2020, MNHC staff began working with Aspen Decker, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and a Salish language revivalist, to create an immersion initiative to bring Salish language and culture into MNHC programming and operations. We continued this partnership through 2021 by adding a land acknowledgement into our programming and including text and audio of Salish names for mammal and bird specimens in our exhibit area.

From publishing pieces on Salish history and culture in *Montana Naturalist* magazine and Field Notes on Montana Public Radio to incorporating Salish knowledge into our Master Naturalist and Visiting Naturalist in the Schools lesson plans, this project is intended to help MNHC create a diverse perspective of Salish people, bringing awareness of Salish culture, language, and knowledge to the greater Missoula community.
Land acknowledgement:
The Montana Natural History Center is located within the traditional homelands of the T’táyaqtn (Bitterroot Salish) and Qlispélixʷ (Kalispel) peoples who have lived here since time immemorial. The Montana Natural History Center is dedicated to the recognition of the first peoples of Missoula and the integration of Salish language, culture, and Indigenous knowledge.

Open AIR Artist in Residence
Open AIR is a place-based Artist-in-Residence program that connects artists and the community with unique sites in Western Montana. We were thrilled to continue our partnership with Open AIR again in 2021, after putting it on pause in 2020, to host two Artists in Residence: Madison Mayfield in May and June and Tracy Hall in September and October.
Learning and nature exploration aren’t just for kids! We provide nature-based education for adults who are fascinated by the natural world and want to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Montana’s wild places and creatures, become better writers, and hone their artistic abilities.

1,350 adults participated in nature writing and nature journaling workshops, lectures, field days, and other adult educational programming in 2021.

The Master Naturalist Program is designed for adults who want to stoke their curiosity, deepen their knowledge of the natural world, and give back to their communities in new ways. We offer a range of programs to fit the needs of a diverse community, but all the classes share a common goal of providing participants with the skills to interpret Montana’s flora, fauna, and landscape. In 2021 we continued to offer both in-person and online versions of this course.

“I had the best week I have had in a long time. A great group of like-minded people coming together to expand our awareness of nature! And Christine was absolutely amazing. Her knowledge and ability to teach that knowledge is next-level.”
— Summer 2021 Master Naturalist

“It was the most enjoyable class I have taken in years. The knowledge and enthusiasm of the instructors was truly contagious. I got exactly what I needed for my desired self-reorientation to the natural world. I knew what I needed and luckily, I knew where to find it. Thanks very much. And, I’m not done by any means.”
— Fall 2021 Master Naturalist

**MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM**

$750
in scholarships awarded to Master Naturalist participants

135 individuals were certified as Master Naturalists in Montana

87 Montana Master Naturalists were certified in Billings, Bozeman, Helena, Polson, the Seeley-Swan Valley, Glacier National Park, and Yellowstone National Park

48 Montana Master Naturalists were certified in Missoula

**VOLUNTEER HOURS:**

137 Master Naturalists volunteered

4,572 hours in their communities and participated in 1,252 hours of continuing education.

(This is more than double the volunteer hours clocked last year!)

In 2021, Montana Master Naturalists gave back to their communities by volunteering with: eBird, Montana Raptor Center, MPG Ranch, Swan Valley Connections, Montana Native Plant Society, Girl Scouts, Association of Nature and Forest Therapy, Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Group, International Wolf Center, a variety of citizen science projects, and so many more!
52 Field Notes aired on Montana Public Radio, 42 of them new—more than ever before! Most were written by participants in our Field Notes writing workshops.

Every week since 1991, Field Notes, written by naturalists, students, and listeners, has inquired about Montana’s natural history. Field Notes airs two times per week on Montana Public Radio: Wednesday at 3:55 p.m. and Saturday at 11:54 a.m.

Field Notes is also available as a podcast! Subscribe on iTunes, Google Play, or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you. This class was extremely grounding in a period of big transition in my life, and it really bolstered my self-confidence to sit with a group of strangers every week and feel seen and heard. Knowing that I have the capacity to sit down and write words that make people feel excited to go outside is an incredible gift, and I am very grateful for this class for it.”

—Zola Kell, fall 2021 Field Notes writing workshop participant

Nature Journaling Conference
MNHC hosted its first in-person Nature Journaling Conference in May of 2021. 27 participants celebrated their love of nature journaling by learning from four experienced artists and instructors: Hannah Hinchman, Nancy Seiler, Claire Emery, and Jenah Mead. Throughout the weekend they learned a variety of nature journaling tips and techniques such as event-mapping, drawing native plants and birds, shading techniques, and so much more!

Certified Interpretive Guide Course
In partnership with the National Association for Interpretation, MNHC offers a Certified Interpretive Guide course for present and future interpretive program educators. Through classroom and field sessions, this course teaches the fundamentals of program development, delivery, and excellence in interpretation.
EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Teacher Benefits Program
All K-12 teachers actively employed in a public or private Montana school are eligible.

Benefits include:

● Free individual membership

● Special invitations to educator events and trainings

● Discounts on museum tours, classroom naturalist presentations, and ID Nature programs

Go to MontanaNaturalist.org/teacher-benefits-program to see the full list of benefits and to sign up.

Montana Naturalist magazine published 2 new issues. 16,000 magazines were distributed locally and to national subscribers.

License Plates
You don’t have to wait until your current plates expire to pick up an MNHC plate!

$14,640 raised in license plate sales!
880 plates sold

MEMBERSHIP

Become a member today and enjoy the following benefits:

● Unlimited free admission to our Center, Kids’ Discovery Room, and Nature Adventure Playground

● Free admission to the miniNaturalist Pre-K Program and naturalist-led hikes

● Discounts on classes, programs, lectures, and summer camps

● Free use of naturalist backpacks for your outdoor adventure (includes binos, field guides, etc.)

● Annual subscription to Montana Naturalist magazine

Through the Association for Science-Technology Centers, MNHC members receive reciprocal free admission to over 300 other science centers in cities including Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and more! For the full list, go to astc.org.

415 members in 2021.
Let’s get to 500 in 2022!

MAKE A GIFT

Support our critical work of educating future conservationists and our community with a gift today. Or consider becoming a monthly donor!

Please visit MontanaNaturalist.org/donate.

Consider including MNHC in your estate plans.
Help us connect people with nature for generations to come. Please consider MNHC in your estate planning. Please visit MontanaNaturalist.org/planned-giving.

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers, board members, and committee members are invaluable to our organization and are integral to the success and high quality of our programming. We are grateful to have been able to see some of our wonderful volunteers in person again in 2021.

Thank you to every volunteer who donated their time in 2021!

We had 100 volunteers donate 1091 hours in 2021. We look forward to providing more opportunities to volunteer in 2022.

We are always looking for more volunteers, and we offer a wide range of opportunities. From helping at the front desk or assisting with field trips to adding your creativity and ideas to our Annual Auction & Banquet or Spring Luncheon, we are sure there is a great fit for you! Apply to be a volunteer here:

MontanaNaturalist.org/volunteer/
We could not operate without the generosity of our many supporters and partners. We thank you all for your ongoing support!

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Animal Wonders
Be Bear Aware Campaign
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
Blackfoot Challenge
Boys and Girls Club
Clark Fork Coalition
Climate Smart Missoula
Fish, Wildlife, and Parks – Jocko River Trout Hatchery
Five Valleys Land Trust
The Flagship Program
Free Cycles
Friends of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge
Garden City Harvest
Girls Scouts of Montana & Wyoming
Glacier Institute
Hellgate Hunters and Anglers
Home ReSource
Inspired Classroom
International Wildlife Film Festival
Missoula County Weed District
Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium
Missoula Federal Credit Union
Missoula in Motion
Missoula PaddleHeads
Missoula Parks and Recreation Conservation Lands Program
Missoula Search and Rescue
Missoula Smokejumper Visitor Center
Missoula Symphony Association
Montana Audubon Center
Montana Discovery Foundation
Montana Environmental Education Association
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Montana Museum of Art and Culture
Montana Native Plant Society
Montana Office of Public Instruction
Montana Osprey Project
Montana Outdoor Science School
Montana Public Radio
Montana Rail Link
Montana State Parks
MPG Ranch
MSU-Flathead Reservation Extension Office
National Bison Range
National Military Family Association
National Wildlife Federation
North Missoula Community Development Corporation
Open AIR
Owl Research Institute
Park Side Credit Union
Partners Creative
PEAS Farm
Raptor View Research Institute
Soil Cycle
Southgate Mall spectrUM
Streamable Learning
Swan Valley Connections
Teller Wildlife Refuge
Thunder Road Farm
Travelers’ Rest State Park and Travelers’ Rest Connection
Montana Trout Unlimited
Trout Unlimited
University of Montana
Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum
University of Montana: Bird Ecology Lab, Broader Impacts Group, Ecology and Organismal Biology, Environmental Studies Department, Office of Civic Engagement, School of Education, Wildlife Biology Department
University of Montana Paleontology Center
USFS, Fire Lab
USFS, Lolo National Forest, Missoula Ranger District
Watson’s Children’s Center
YWCA
2021 STAFF
Ser Anderson, Teaching Naturalist
Kellen Beck, Marketing and Events Coordinator
Alyssa Cornell-Chavez, Collections Registrar & Teaching Naturalist
Allison De Jong, Communications Coordinator & Editor, Montana Naturalist and Field Notes
Thurston Elfstrom, Executive Director
Keri Geiser, Teaching Naturalist
Alyssa Giffin, Camps Coordinator
Drew Lefebvre, Museum Coordinator
Pat Little, Development & Operations Coordinator
Jenah Mead, Teaching Naturalist
Christine Morris, Community Programs Coordinator
Stephanie Parker, Teaching Naturalist
Jennifer Robinson, Director of Education and Programs
Mark Schleicher, Development Director
Ashley Sinclair, Museum Associate
Kelli Van Noppen, ID Nature Coordinator

Moved on to new adventures in 2021
Glenna Tawney, Marketing and Events Coordinator
Bailey Zook, VNS & Homeschool Programs Coordinator

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Hank Fischer
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(Rotated off Board in 2021)
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Kelley Willett, President
Allison Young

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Connecting People with Nature
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